



Town of Warren, Rhode Island

Minutes of the Economic Development Board

The Town of Warren, RI Economic Development Board met at a Regular Meeting on November 21, 2011 at 6:00 p.m. at Town Hall, located at 514 Main Street. The presiding officer was Brandt Heckert. Board members present were Sara Volino, Paula Silva, Karen Dionne, Spencer Morris, Kate Dickson, Mark Lombardi and Darcy DaCosta. Council member Cathy Tattrie was in attendance. Randy Rosenbaum was in attendance as a guest speaker. Mr. Cary was absent. Ex officio member Caroline Wells was absent. Ms. DaCosta left the meeting at 7:40 p.m. Kristin MacDonald was present at the meeting to serve as Secretary to the EDB.

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m.

1. Review and Approval of Minutes from the Regular Meeting of October 17, 2011

The minutes from the regular meeting held on September 26, 2011 were reviewed by the members via email. Ms. Dickson made a motion to accept the minutes, the motion was seconded by Ms. Dickson, and all members were in favor.

2. Guest speaker- Randy Rosenbaum, Executive Director of RISCA, will discuss funding options for public art projects and initiatives

The presentation focused on areas of interest which included how to best utilize the tools offered by the state to promote the arts in the community and how additional state and national programs could provide support to programs in Warren. Mr. Rosenbaum also emphasized the role of RISCA in supporting efforts on a local level, and how the agency could provide funding connections, assist in crafting proposals, and serve as an advocate on a state and local level.

Mr. Rosenbaum described the tax incentives available to artists living and working in Warren, as well as the tax incentives to galleries in the district. There is the possibility of funding at the state level for a brochure or cultural guide to Warren that would promote the arts district; he also stated that RISCA has provided funding for “gallery nights” in different communities across the state. Mr. Rosenbaum continued with an overview of the RISCA programs. National programs concerned with the role of arts in public place making, such as the “Our Town” grant program funded by the Federal

Endowment for the Arts, would be excellent grant opportunities to improve public spaces in Warren. Applications for two of these type of grants are due in the spring of 2012; RISCA could potentially be both a financial and a logistical partner in these grant programs. Mr. Rosenbaum also emphasized the importance of having a point person within town government to promote arts based programs within the community. Mr. Rosenbaum answered questions about criteria for defining qualifying artists and also described various arts education programs sponsored by RISCA. He left the meeting after this agenda item. Ms. Tattrie also left the meeting after this agenda item.

3. Discussion and Action to support the EPA Brownfield Assessment grant application by the Town Planner

Mr. Heckert read the letter on behalf of the EDB supporting the EPS Brownfield Assessment grant application. Ms. Volino made a motion to accept the letter, the motion was seconded by Ms. DaCosta, and all members were in favor.

4. Discussion and Action to write the Economic Development Administration a letter supporting a grant for Hope and Main

Mr. Heckert read the letter on behalf of the EDB to the EDA supporting a grant for Hope and Main. A motion was made by Ms. DaCosta to accept the letter, the motion was seconded by Ms. Volino, and all members were in favor.

5. Report on tax stabilization programs (Morris)

After presenting the Board with a copy of the municipal codes section 7-31 and 7-32, Mr. Morris gave the board a brief overview on the tax stabilization program. Basically business owners who make property improvements get a prorated tax credit at one hundred percent of the improvement cost on a sliding scale for five years. Applications for the program are approved by Town Council on a case by case basis. Mr. Morris also discussed the section regarding tax benefits for farm, forest, and open space (section 7-32). In this case, when agricultural property is approved for the program property value and taxes are frozen. Mr. Morris noted that property owners who are interested in starting an agricultural program at this time are not getting much of a benefit because land values are fairly high. This is an area of the tax stabilization program that could be looked at more closely regarding economic development related to agricultural growth and open space. The Board agreed on the need to focus on making the commercial and industrial tax stabilization program stronger and the need to promote the program more aggressively.

The Board briefly discussed the Narragansett Brewery and tax incentives; Ms. Dickson said she would email the Town Solicitor, Anthony DeSisto, for clarification on the EDB's role in contacting the Narragansett Brewery.

6. Update on creation of a business retention plan (Lombardi)

Mr. Lombardi reported that despite repeated attempts he has been unable to contact anyone at the RIEDC and he now plans to contact state representatives. He will keep the Board updated on his progress with this agenda item.

7. Update on status of the economic development section of Comprehensive Plan (Dionne)

Ms. Dionne reported that Caroline Wells said that the individual sections of the Comprehensive Plan can be updated at any time. Jane MacDougall told Ms. Dionne that the Planning Board would be willing to meet to work on the section; however, she believed that Caroline Wells was concerned that more emphasis needed to be placed on areas beyond the downtown. Ms. Dionne said that she would contact Caroline Wells before the next Board meeting for clarification on whether the section needs additional revision.

8. Report on creating a website to centralize EDB information (Cary)

Ms. Dickson reported on Mr. Cary's behalf about a centralized data system through Google Sites which would be for the EDB's internal use only. Only board members would be able to access the site. No conversations would be posted on the website; it would be for posting information only. Ms. Dickson said she would consult Tony DeSisto for approval and guideline on the EDB using a centralized website.

9. Report from business survey workgroup (Volino, Dionne, Heckert)

The business survey workgroup presented a list of questions for business owners. The objective is to approach business owners individually. Ms. Volino felt that the EDB should make an attempt to establish a face to face relationship with business owners. The Board discussed whether the survey should focus primarily on Main Street; the Board decided to focus on the Main Street area (up to Tom's Market). The survey would not include Water Street. Ms. Dickson said she would get feedback from the businesses that are part of Discover Warren. Ms. Silva was concerned the process would be time consuming; Mr. Heckert noted that the process would take place over a two month period. Moving forward, the work group will work through December on reviewing the list of businesses and sending updates before the next meeting.

10. Discussion of the directive from Council for the EDB to study and make recommendations to revise the business registration fee ordinance

Mr. Heckert stated that Town Council directed the EDB to revise the business registration ordinance. The Board discussed various aspects of the business registration fee and the tangible tax. Mr. Heckert, noting that Town Council is looking for clarification on who needs to pay the fee, would like to set up a work group to study the issue. Questions for consideration will include who would need to register and the distinctions between businesses and hobbies. Mr. Heckert asked if anyone would like to take a lead on the issue. The Board members agreed to research this item and come

prepared to focus on the item for the next meeting. Due to the holiday schedule, the Board agreed to move the December meeting forward to Monday, December 12th, 2011. This agenda item will be the focus of the December meeting.

11. Discussion to consider making the Warren Arts Initiative group independent from the EDB (Silva)

Ms. Silva stated that the Warren Arts Initiative would like to function as an independent group from the EDB; this will be an agenda item on the Town Council meeting in December. Ms. Silva reported that most towns in the state have independent arts councils, and that Ms. Tattre was concerned that the EDB was too focused on the arts. Overall, the opinion of the Board was that more time was needed to discuss this issue. Ms. Volino said she would contact Ms. Tattre about delaying placing this item on the Town Council agenda. The Board agreed to discuss this agenda item more fully in January.

Mr. Heckert stated that the parking signs are finished and are ready to be installed by the Department of Public Works.

A motion was made to adjourn, the motion was seconded, and all members were in favor.

The meeting adjourned at 8:58 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kristin M. MacDonald

Minutes submitted by Kristin MacDonald
December 9, 2011